

Jeannette Hayner, Republican

Minority leader is queen of the 'Men's Club'

by Peter Rinearson
Times staff reporter

In Olympia, Jeannette Hayner is queen of the Men's Club.

Hayner is closer than any woman ever has been to calling the shots in what has been called Olympia's most exclusive men's club, the State Senate.

A Republican and a lawyer, the Senate minority leader is assertive, bright, diplomatic, quite conservative and decidedly feminine. "I have always conducted myself in a ladylike manner," she says, offering a formula: "Think like a man, work like a dog, and act like a lady."

"She's a pretty tough lady," says Senator John Jones, a Bellevue Republican who, as caucus chairman, is second in command.

Hayner rarely diverts her direct gaze from an interviewer's eyes. She is well-groomed, a conservative but stylish dresser. She is 61, but it doesn't show.

What shows is her political conservatism.

Hayner hopes to help cut state spending substantially, reduce the role of government, and give business more freedom.

"Our caucus is unified in its commitment to fiscal responsibility, and containing government," she says. "The message we got in this fall's election is the need for some controls on government. I tend to support the arts and that kind of thing, if we can afford it; if we can't afford it, I'm going to be pragmatic."

Hayner says the men's-club atmosphere doesn't bother or intimidate her. "I've had a certain amount of training in that, having been to law school," she says, adding that the law schools of the 1930s had far fewer women than at present.

Hayner is from Walla Walla, where she is a highly visible member of the affluent "royalty" of the small town. In the words of a friend, "she golfs with Old Walla Walla." Her list of campaign contributors reads like a Who's Who of the city.

She has more potential clout than any Republican the Senate has had for a long time, because her caucus is stronger numerically than it has been in a quarter century. It has 24 members; the Democrats control only 25.

Augmenting the power of the Senate G.O.P. caucus is its unity, generally behind conservative policies — and its allies, a strong Republican majority in the



House and a new G.O.P. governor, John Spellman.

Whether she can marshal the potential of her position into effective leadership remains to be seen. Colleagues express high regard for her skill and drive, yet acknowledge she is treading deeper water than she has in the past.

"She has not yet been tested," says a Republican senator. "We picked Jeannette because of her fairness. She is learning to be a leader."

"For a woman to come into the Senate Republican caucus, which is a male bastion, she has to be better than just good," he adds. "The question is whether anyone can do it. Then you put a woman in a man's world, and it compounds the problem."

Hayner came to power in May, 1979, when she and two other Republicans toppled then-Minority Leader Jim Matsen, of Selah. The idea was to broaden the base in caucus leadership, and Hayner was a compromise selection for the top leadership title. Actual power was spread around.

She was selected because she is fair, hears people out, is suitably conservative and was acceptable to senators from both Eastern and Western Washington. She is glue in a caucus wanting to stick together.

Some Republicans by the public-

relations value of a woman leader was a factor in her selection, too.

Hayner's leadership position was consolidated in November when Republicans made big gains in the Senate, then pushed her out in front as the single leader of the caucus.

"I think she will continue to survive, partly because some of the people who were behind Jim Matsen are behind her now," says House Speaker Bill Polk, Mercer Island Republican.

Jones says Hayner's strength in the caucus has been furthered by the arrival of several former representatives as new G.O.P. senators. "A lot of people coming over from the House are very much with her," he says.

King County Councilwoman Lois North, once a Republican senator, says she doubts whether "the Men's Club" will really let a woman take control. North, a former Olympia roommate of Hayner, predicts the new minority leader "will be subtly excluded" from some decisions. "There's always the tendency of men to get together and drink beer in someone's office. I doubt Jeannette will be accepted on that basis."

Although Hayner has never practiced law in Washington State (she is a member only of the Oregon Bar), her husband is a

prominent attorney in Walla Walla.

She doesn't argue with the characterization that she is "very well-to-do," but Hayner disagrees vigorously with the evaluation of a friend of hers, who says:

"Jeannette is a wealthy person, healthy and strong. Sometimes those people don't understand or empathize at all with the handicapped or the blind. She lives in a really rarified, wealthy atmosphere. I don't know if she's ever ridden a bus in downtown Seattle and seen what's there every day. Walla Walla is very different."

Her friend wonders aloud whether Hayner will be insensitive to the less fortunate in her efforts to trim the state budget.

At the suggestion, Hayner leans far forward in her chair, reaching out in an imploring gesture of indignation.

"It's not a fair criticism," she says. "Just because a person has done well doesn't mean they don't understand how the other half live."

"I started the Meals on Wheels program in Walla Walla. In the beginning, we delivered the meals door to door to the poor in Walla Walla. There are other people who have done more, but I've done quite a lot. I've been on the board of the United Fund. You name it," Hayner says.

Of Hayner's sensitivity to the problems of the urban poor, one lobbyist says: "There's concern there, but it's tempered with fiscal restraint."

Hayner was born Jeannette Hafner in Portland on January 22, 1919. She attended school in Oregon, and graduated from law school there. She practiced law for three years in the Bonneville Power Administration legal department in Portland.

She married H.H. (Dutch) Hahner, whom she had met in law school. After winning election to the House in 1972, she and her husband changed the spelling of their last name to make it read as it was pronounced.

The Hayners' eldest son, Steve, 32, is a minister at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle. Another son, James, 30, is an attorney in his father's law firm. Judy, 26, a daughter, is in marketing in California.

Jeannette Hayner was elected to the Senate for the first time in 1976, after four years in the House in which she spoke against the power special interests wield in Olympia (1973), the elimination of a loyalty oath for candidates for public office (1974), and a law banning sexual discrimination in public schools (1975).

In March, 1975, she said of tax increases: "The people continue to say 'no' but we aren't listening. If we continue in this way, one thing that will be discarded will be some of the members of the Legislature."

Hayner ran unopposed for re-election last fall but raised almost \$20,000, according to records filed with the state Public

Disclosure Commission. The funds were mainly from financial institutions, other business interests and Walla Walla citizens. "I sent out one fund-raising letter and got 300 individual contributions," she says.

Hayner only spent about \$12,000. Several thousand dollars of her expenditures were contributions to other Republicans seeking election to the Senate. Contributing to other candidates is common among lawmakers courting favor among their colleagues because they seek to gain or retain a leadership post.

Hayner says she's conscious that the public doubts the integrity of legislative leaders, particularly since recent convictions against the former co-Speaker of the House and Senate majority leader.

She says her record in public life, including seven years of controversy on the Walla Walla School Board, will reveal nothing suspicious. "There were those who disliked me because I was firm and opinionated, and did not deviate. But that's about all you'll find against me," she says.

Councilwoman North vouches for Hayner. "There's a woman who would never take a payoff or do anything shady. She was there to do the best ... I have great respect for her ability."

Hayner says she does not often go to meals with lobbyists, and that is borne in the disclosure records of 31 prominent lobbyists. "I've never had much to do with lobbyists. For the most part, I've found them to be sincere and honest and I've treated them that way," she says. "I'm really good friends with a lot of legislators," she adds.

During the 1980 session, Hayner attended 17 and missed 13 of the Senate Energy and Utilities Committee meetings, and attended one of three meetings since the session ended in March.

Her attendance at the related meetings of a special committee investigating nuclear-power plant construction projects of the Washington Public Power Supply System was similarly spotty. Through early last month, she attended five and missed eight meetings.

Hayner's attendance at Judiciary Committee meetings was better, reflecting, perhaps, her interests as an attorney. She attended 13 of 18 meetings during the 1980 session, and one of four post-session meetings.

Her attendance at Education Committee meetings is described by committee staff as excellent.

Senate records show she missed only 10 of the more than 350 recorded floor votes on bills during the 1980 session, and only 43 of about 750 recorded floor votes on bills during the regular and special sessions in 1979.

(This series of articles will continue with examinations of the House majority and minority leaders.)